



## **Tattoo My Heart by FangirlingStrangerThings**

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**Summary:** It's the summer of 1985. El is weeks away from starting high school and joining a new social order that she knows nothing about. She's nervous, she's excited, but most of all she wants to fit in, too scared to be different. But Mike will always be there to show her that different is beautiful. One shot inspired by the very talented Jose Ramos Mileven illustrations.

# Tattoo My Heart

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AN: Sometimes you can wait days for inspiration, and other times you can see one amazing and beautiful photo of Mileven and suddenly you've got a scene playing in your mind!

This one shot is inspired by a stunning Mileven illustration that Jose Ramos created. If you're not following him on Instagram, then you really should be! joseramos1972

I don't think you're ready for this amount of fluff!

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## *Summer 1985*

The sun was setting over Hawkins, Indiana. An array of indigo, pink and ink blue contrasting in the sky from the bright beams of the sun as it began to sink into the horizon, signifying the end of another long summer day.

Mike Wheeler was enjoying the last rays of light beaming into the basement and admiring how the sun was highlighting strands of the curly hair belonging to the beautiful and powerful El Hopper. Her hair was turning golden, especially at the ends and as always Mike found himself captivated by her. El, his best friend, his *girlfriend*.

Usually she would be mesmerised with him too, or more specifically the multiplying freckles splayed across his cheeks and nose, a reminder of days spent by the lake with his girlfriend and friends. But today El wasn't counting his numerous freckles.

She was sat at the D&D table, multiple practice test papers spread in front of her as she frowned. Her hazel eyes narrowed with concentration on the difficult equations whilst she absentmindedly ran her pointer finger over her tattoo.

The *011* was as bold against her tanned skin as the day El first showed Mike the first inkling of her true identity.

He continued to watch her for a moment from the couch, torn between wanting her to be able to focus on revising for her make up tests before she began high school with him and the party in three weeks, and also wanting her full attention like the needy boyfriend he was.

It had been three hours of Mike reading comics and making notes for the next D&D campaign whilst the shuffling of paper and the scratching of pens and pencils reminded Mike not to interrupt his girlfriend from her studies.

But then again, three hours was a *long* time to not have kissed or held El, especially when they were alone together.

Mike pushed his X-Men comic to the side and focused back in on his girlfriend, noticing how her eyes had moved from the test paper and instead were staring intently at her tattoo. Her brow was lowered, and her lips were pursed in thought.

"Are you okay?" Mike asked quietly, getting up from the cushy sofa and walking slowly over to El who had blinked and looked up at him, her cheeks blushing slightly in what looked like embarrassment.

"Yes," El answered quickly, too quickly. She averted her eyes back to her test, picking up her red pen and sitting up a little straighter as if poised and ready to begin. It was an act, and Mike knew his girlfriend enough by now to see straight through it.

"El," Mike began calmly, dropping down into the seat next to her. "Friends don't lie."

He knew he had her there and could physically see the brick wall of hesitation lower from her hazel eyes. El sighed and put her pen down slowly, buying herself some time before she lifted her head and met Mike's gaze.

He smiled at her softly, taking in her beauty and reluctance. "It's okay," Mike assured her in almost a whisper. "You can tell me anything, you know that." He reached for her hand and their fingers immediately entwined, a spark of electricity running straight up Mike's arm and making his heart beat faster.

El exhaled deeply, keeping her vulnerable eyes on her boyfriend. "What if...what if I get treated badly for being...different..." She mumbled quietly, her gaze flicking to the floor almost ashamed.

Mike frowned in confusion, watching her for a moment and trying to understand. "Treated differently by who?"

"Other girls..." El whispered, keeping her eyes on the worn and frayed carpet.

"Max?" Mike asked in bewilderment. Max would be the *last* person to treat El badly, besides Mike of course. The two girls had grown closer since the Snow Ball back in December and he was positive they would both refer to each other as best friends.

"No," El said chuckling softly out of love but also exasperation at Mike's lack of understanding.

"High school girls." She explained before looking down at her tattoo and trying to get her baggy blue patterned shirt to cover the mark, but it was no use. She sighed in frustration. "I'm *different* from them..."

Mike blinked in surprise processing her words and taking in her clear irritation at not being able to cover her tattoo, not even the bracelet Hopper gave her could obscure the mark completely from view.

"I *saw* them when I went with dad to meet the principal," El explained, her eyes wide and helpless. "They all had pretty clothes, and long hair a-and they will be smarter than me." She sniffled and looked at her tattoo again, shame in her eyes that felt like ice to Mike's frantic heart.

He was shaking his head before he even reached out with his free hand to gently rest his palm against El's slightly damp cheek as the first two tears escaped from her bottom lashes. Mike wiped the tears away with the softest touch of his thumb as he slowly smiled with adoration at his incredible girl.

"You *are* different from them El, but in the *best* ways." Mike whispered as El slowly lifted her gaze and met his eyes. Her watery

hazel orbs looked uncertain, but she didn't interrupt him. "You are the bravest person I have ever met. Your tattoo, it's a battle scar. It shows that you *survived*, that *you* won."

Mike gently squeezed his and El's entwined hands before stroking delicately at her cheek bone with the other. "Yeah your clothes are different. But you know what? Those girls are trying to dress how they think guys want them to dress. How they think magazines want them to dress. But you...El you wear what you want and there is *no one* more beautiful and adorable than you. I mean have you *seen* that yellow scrunchie you have?!"

Mike felt immediate relief rush to his clenched stomach when El laughed in surprise at his words and gave him a watery warm smile, her eyes more open to what he was telling her.

"And as for smart. El, you have never been in the education system before and yet you're starting high school in three weeks! You've literally caught up on my entire educational knowledge in less than a *year*! I dare you to try and find someone who is more intelligent than you." Mike said with an encouraging warmth and a bright gleam in his eyes. Just listing even some of El's best attributes was making his heart race when he realised how lucky he was to have her.

El exhaled deeply, Mike physically seeing the tension in her body starting to lift with his love and reassurance. Her eyes fell onto her wrist and she sighed, "but Mike the tat – "

"It doesn't matter." He said immediately interrupting her before his eyes fell onto the pens next to her work sheet. A sudden idea sparked Mike's mind like a lightbulb turning on and he quickly grabbed the pens before standing up, pulling El along with him by the joined hands.

"Come on," Mike said playfully, giving his girlfriend a grin over his shoulder as he led her towards the blanket fort. *Their* blanket fort.

The basement was getting darker as sun started to give way to the stars. Mike let go of El's hand and bent down to turn on the soft glow of the night light. He shuffled into the fort that was starting to get a little cramped from his increasing height. Dustin was right, puberty

was hitting him like a train.

Mike looked up at El, giving her a slightly childish smile as he patted the space between his legs indicating for her to sit down. She grinned almost shyly and crawled into the fort, propping herself up against Mike, her wavy locks resting against his shoulder as he wrapped his arms around her.

El watched with baited breath as Mike carefully removed her bracelet, totally exposing her tattoo as he tied the blue sentimental piece of jewellery onto her opposite wrist. Her eyes stayed on the etched numbers that had been her only form of identity until the moment she escaped the lab. It was a part of herself that she didn't think that Mike could ever love.

He worked in silence knowing El was watching his every move as he took the lid off both the black and red ink pens. Mike lifted El's wrist, holding it delicately in his grasp as he focused on making a shape with the red pen. His tongue was pressed against his bottom lip in concentration as a love heart was created.

El gasped, her throat suddenly tight with emotion as her captivated eyes looked down at her wrist. Mike carefully shaded red inside of the love heart before changing the pen to the black one. The tip of the pen almost tickled El's skin as she smiled and watched him gently shape the letters of his name below the heart.

Mike bent down with difficulty, bringing El's wrist up to meet him halfway before he pressed a lingering kiss on the tattooed words '011'. El couldn't speak, she was choked and overwhelmed by Mike's love.

She watched on as he moved the black pen to his own wrist and repeated in writing his own name. Understanding where he was going with this, El moved her hand up to stop him.

She turned to smile at him, their eyes locking for a moment in a beautiful acceptance as El took the red pen and carefully caressed the smooth skin of Mike's wrist and arm with her finger before drawing what she hoped was an identical love heart to the one he had given her.

El changed the pen with purpose and with a racing heart she inked Mike's skin with her signature mark, a part of her that she now knew her boyfriend loved too, because '011' was one of the many things that made her so perfectly different. And he loved that she was different.

Mirroring Mike's earlier actions, El brought his wrist up to her mouth, her lips brushing against his italic name written onto his skin. She smiled against his tattoo and then slowly turned to look up into his face, the last streak of sunlight beaming over Mike's perfect features and making him look angelic.

El was in awe of his beautiful, her hazel eyes dancing over his features, the hundreds of freckles that she adored counting, the full almost red lips that made her heart race and the dark sparkling eyes that gave her all of the love she could *ever* need.

"I love you Mike," she whispered into the peace and calm of the basement, her words *only* for him.

"I love you too El."

Mike leaned in, the beam of warm sun now coating them both as he pressed his lips to hers. Their mouths soft and tender with one another, fitting like a jigsaw and as perfect as two soul mates kiss can be.

El pulled back slowly, her eyes full and blissful as she stared up at her favourite person. She rested her head back on Mike's chest, a smile of contentment and acceptance of who she was filling her features as his protective arms crossed over her body.

Her arms looped over his, clutching onto him as she felt his gentle warm breath against her honey locks as he pressed a delicate kiss to her head. El's eyes fluttered closed, Mike's lids already shut, both of them breathing each other in, their bodies and hearts close.

And while the ink would eventually fade from their youthful skin, the intense and beautiful love they shared was forever tattooed on their hearts.

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Is everyone still alive or did you drown in fluff?!

Pretty please let me know what you thought :-D And check out Jose Ramos's AMAZING illustrations!